

## Committee on Local Government

September 18, 2014

Testimony on HB 5617

From: John Tuinstra

1720 142<sup>nd</sup> Ave Dorr, MI 49323

Committee Members,

Thank you for holding the hearing on HB 5617, allowing local library board members to be compensated. Currently MCL 397.204, Section 4 says "... no director shall receive compensation as such." In January of this year, I asked Representative Yonkers to write this bill in order to make a minor change in the law which would allow Library Board members to be paid.

My rationale in asking for this change is quite straight-forward. The Apostle Paul wrote to his friend Timothy that "The worker deserves his wages." (I Timothy 5:18, NIV) It is a fairly straightforward moral issue. As a State Representative, you don't work for nothing, and as a township trustee, neither do I. There is such a thing as volunteer work, and when I come to this building, it has always been on a volunteer basis. Volunteer work has very little in standards and expectations, but working as an elected library board member is different. It has expectations for attendance, preparation, and participation. In this kind of situation it is "altogether fitting and proper" to pay the person doing the work on a regular basis.

There is a second reason for wanting this minor change in the law. It is, in a single word, recruitment. It is challenging to find qualified people willing to serve as precinct delegates and local boards and commissions. Too often seats go unfilled or are filled by people who just happened to be there at the time. If people are paid for their service, a few more of them will be willing to serve.

A third reason is that it will tend to improve the quality of the service provided to the citizens. If elected officials are being paid, they work with the knowledge that they are responsible for their service, and will, in general, take it more seriously.

Now, let me next address the remainder of the new wording, "as determined by the Board of Directors." This determination is best done as close to the voters as possible. If it is determined within each local community, citizens have a much better chance of holding their elected officials accountable. Our township serves as an outstanding example of citizens watching their elected officials. We have experienced a recall effort, a referendum effort, and in two years have replaced five of our seven township board members, our entire parks commission, and about half the members of our appointed boards. We have active engagement by citizens and better government as a result. We no longer pay \$1200 for a trash receptacle, or \$2500 for an iron grate in a sidewalk around a \$450 tree with a \$20 water bag. The traffic light that was originally going to cost the citizens \$180,000 will now cost about \$140,000 less than that. We aren't through with our growing pains and we haven't corrected all our problems, but citizens make our local government better when they get involved, and when they have the opportunity to evaluate the actions of their elected public servants.

The Declaration of Independence contains one of the most profound statements ever written about democracy, freedom, and consent in government:

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of

Happiness.--That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, *deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed*, --That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the *Right of the People to alter* or to abolish it...

That profound concept is more likely to work when the "consent of the governed" is close enough to home to be accomplished with reasonable efforts. It is less likely to work when the decision-makers are farther away and isolated from local realities.

This bill is prime example of local people engaging in democracy. I have literally walked to all of the following: the library, the township hall, the home of the gentleman who discovered something wasn't quite "kosher" at the library, the home of another township trustee who has taken a keen interest in the library, and the restaurant where I met with Rep Yonkers to request this bill.

The Federal government is incomprehensible to any single citizen. State government is very complex, including the rest of MCL Chapter 397. Local government is better government because it is local.

Please do not cave in to any pressure to move the determination of this compensation away from the local level. In my opinion, that would be worse than leaving the issue entirely as it is.

Thank You

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "John Tuinstra". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

John Tuinstra, BS, MA, MA